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## Collaboration Overview

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[Partnership for Results](#) (The Partnership) is a model of local governance designed to implement a broad spectrum of evidence-based programs for the benefit of youth at risk. Operating in Cayuga County in Central New York, it has improved outcomes for children and youth and their families since its founding in 2000.

The Partnership’s collaboration structure includes the following:

- A strong leadership structure and team
- An effective decision-making process
- Implementation of protocols for collecting data across agency lines
- Evaluation of effectiveness to drive improvement
- Established joint fiduciary responsibility to braid funding

The Partnership’s best practices include:

- Maintaining strong and supportive leadership
- Sharing fiscal responsibility to create a sustainable structure
- Fostering cross-agency awareness and providing cross-training
- Focusing on sustainability from the start

The Partnership learned these lessons:

- Develop instruments and databases designed to meet your needs.
- Sustain programs through changes in leadership.
- Manage relationships and conflicts.
- Be aware of potential for resistance to change.
- Reinforce staff commitment.

## Collaboration Purpose

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The Partnership is designed to facilitate and sustain an integrated service delivery system of prevention and evidence-based early intervention programs for children and youth in Cayuga County, New York.

Federal grant funding served as a catalyst for the community to reassess how it wanted to address some of its pressing social problems. Before the Partnership activities were initiated, there was little collaboration between child-serving public agencies in any systemic, ongoing, or sustainable form. As part of a [Safe Schools/Healthy Students](#) grant, agency directors initiated a wide-ranging community assessment and a review of programs to address community deficits and to strengthen assets.

As part of this process, agency leaders came to recognize more explicitly that the children they were each serving were often the same. These children were accessing, at one point of entry after another, many of the various public and community-based services systems. Agency leaders acknowledged that service delivery was often undermined by being insufficient, discontinuous, and rarely either evidence-based or routinely evaluated.

In creating the Partnership, the public agency directors planned to build a sustainable form of local governance that was data driven and thoroughly collaborative in nature. This effort spread from strategic planning to sustainability. They believed that by changing both human behavior and organizational infrastructure, this model of collaboration would allow them to serve the interests of children across systems.

## About the Collaboration

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The [Partnership](#) is a quasi-governmental entity, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, whose board is comprised exclusively of directors of public agencies operating in the areas of education, human services, and law enforcement. It was formed in March 2000 with the support of a federal grant from the U.S. Departments of Education, Health & Human Services, and Justice. The Partnership's program design is focused on making system-wide improvements including:

- maximizing available service resources by reducing duplication;
- improving the effectiveness of services by enhancing their continuity; and
- promoting ongoing collaboration between public and community-based providers.

The Partnership has implemented over 25 evidence-based educational and human services programs in Cayuga County and parts of Onondaga County, and it has developed and implemented a range of interagency databases that facilitate service integration, support fidelity of implementation, and enhance accountability.



Image from: [http://www.partnershipforresults.org/about\\_us.html](http://www.partnershipforresults.org/about_us.html)

## Collaboration Structure

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The collaboration structure is designed to accomplish the following:

### **Develop a strong leadership structure and team**

The Partnership's board is comprised exclusively of directors of public agencies operating in the areas of children and family needs, including social services, health, education, law enforcement, and juvenile justice. As these positions do not turn over simultaneously, there is considerable institutional memory at the level of the Partnership board. There is also a professional staff working for the Partnership and serving the interests of all participating public agencies; since initiation of Partnership activities in 2000, turnover among these core staff members has been quite rare, providing even more program continuity.

### **Create an effective decision-making process**

From the beginning, the Partnership members took responsibility for the processes of selecting evidence-based programs to implement in the community. This has allowed for

- cross-agency data collection, training, and other collaborative activities;
- the establishment of both process and outcome benchmarks; and
- both governmental and other non-governmental agencies involved in Partnership work being held accountable.

The Partnership established agency and programmatic legitimacy by making data-driven decisions, by continuously insisting on fidelity to proven programs, and by revealing short- and long-term outcomes in a timely manner. The Board operates on the well-established principles that complex social and emotional problems require a multiplicity of responses; that effective

program implementation requires systematic, cross-system collaboration; and that, for proven programs, fidelity of implementation is critical for obtaining positive outcomes.

The Partnership is designed to be constantly innovating in terms of deciding when to phase programs in or out; keeping abreast of funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels; and reevaluating what they do and how they do it. Evaluation is built into every phase of everything they do to support data-driven decision-making.

## **Implement protocols for collecting data across agency lines**

The Partnership design is based on research indicating that many children are multiply at risk. To assess those risks thoroughly requires cross-agency data collection for the purposes of assessment, treatment planning, and service coordination. In order to collect information across agencies in a rights-protective manner, from the beginning, the Partnership established a set of operational principles and legal structures. All the public agencies on the Partnership Board agreed on a common consent form, how the data would be safeguarded and privacy maintained, and what kinds of information could be collected.

The Partnership data aggregation process is not information sharing, which is generally problematic as a legal matter, and often as a practical one. Data collection across agency lines, however, is generally permissible under limited circumstances. The Partnership has developed a consent-driven system of data collection that permits professional service providers to collect data from a wide array of pertinent sources, supporting more comprehensive assessment and treatment of clients and improving their capacity to coordinate interventions. Disclosure of any portion of a file is also governed by principles of informed client consent that are clearly articulated in the Partnership's consent form. The Partnership's interagency databases are all developed to ensure that the principles of this consent-driven system are monitored and reinforced.

The consent form for families, which permits systematic, multi-agency data collection for the purposes of comprehensive assessment and treatment, is complex but written in plain language. Program implementers discuss data collection, assessment, and treatment in non-threatening, natural settings, and those providing consent (typically primary caregivers) are given an opportunity to explore how their households stand to benefit from comprehensive service planning.

## **Evaluate effectiveness to drive improvement**

The Partnership's approach to supporting programs is informed by research demonstrating that there is a clear tendency of evidence-based programs to regress to a mean; in other words, when replicated, many proven programs have strong results upon initial implementation but diminished efficacy over time. To address this problem, every program implemented by the Partnership is evaluated regularly, often semi-annually. The Partnership takes care to ensure that critical outcome measures are as accessible as possible. Evaluation results are widely shared so that stakeholders and other members of the community can stay informed of trends in program outcomes and provide supports, when needed, to improve programmatic effectiveness. To monitor and evaluate programs, the Partnership relies both on outside evaluators, as well as a staff person whose duty is to monitor program data.

The Partnership has created interagency databases to monitor and reinforce fidelity of implementation. Such databases permit both supervisors and implementers to know, in a timely manner, that salient elements of evidence-based programs are being implemented as intended. The databases also support clinician efforts to comprehensively assess children, link treatment goals and service needs, track client development, and effectively integrate services. Partnership staff members play a critical role in database development, identifying the kinds of information that they think is important to collect, and helping ensure that the databases are easy to use and useful tools for assessing and supporting the positive development of youth. Program data is typically entered by those implementing the programs, and users are given the capacity to build reports permitting them to monitor whether or not they are meeting their own standards and goals.

### **Establish joint fiduciary responsibility to braid funding**

The Partnership Board exercises a joint fiduciary responsibility across lines of government for a number of its initiatives. The agency has created the legal infrastructure necessary to share, or braid, funding in new ways, which involve many legal documents, memoranda of understanding (MOUs), etc.

The Partnership uses a variety of different funding sources to braid funding, including grant funds, government contracts, and local resources. Ongoing review of program data has firmly established that the complex and multiple adverse circumstances affecting children require shared, cross-agency responses and, as a result, shared costs.

## **Promising Practices**

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The following practices have helped the Partnership to be successful in working collaboratively.

### **Have strong and supportive leadership**

The Partnership and the agencies that comprise it include government officials who have come to believe in collaborative work. Over time, with positive results, the Board has gained great confidence in the abilities of the Partnership's staff to conduct cross-system work. These officials support the staff across a wide range of activities, such as

- monitoring, evaluation, supervision, and maintenance of the entity's initiatives;
- providing access to agency employees;
- helping them identify and secure program funding; and
- generally assisting them to identify opportunities for collaboration.

### **Share fiscal responsibility to create a sustainable structure**

One of the primary goals of this form of collaboration is to marginalize the cost of doing business. The process of implementing, monitoring, and sustaining evidence-based programs has significant commonalities across agencies, and it is far more efficient and effective for a staff accountable to all agencies to undertake these tasks than for the skills and capacities to

be developed independently at each agency. Critical to that goal is joint fiduciary responsibility, a collaborative process that supports program sustainability across lines of government and shared responsibility for program outcomes.

### **Foster cross-agency awareness and provide cross-training**

Programs are effective when they serve those who are most eligible to benefit from them. It is therefore important to understand the target populations of proven programs. To achieve that goal, the Partnership conducts cross-system training and provides technical assistance to agencies on an ongoing basis. The Partnership, with its databases and interagency expertise, forms a single point of integration. It uses its databases to establish an up-to-date record of programs and services in the region, with a focus on their accessibility and impacts. Service professionals accessing the databases continuously learn about programs and services.

### **Focus on sustainability from the start**

Collaborations are often formed for the purpose of sustaining programs that are already struggling, but for sustainability efforts to be effective, the collaboration should be a part of the process of selecting evidence-based programs for implementation. Among the sustainability issues that the Partnership considers *before* implementing a program are

- how much training and ongoing technical assistance the staff will need;
- how fragile the program is, or how susceptible it is to significant disruption; and
- the extent to which recurring funds are available that might be used to continue the program once the initial funding ends.

For sustainability, broad-based support across agency lines is usually essential. Such support is typically the result of many factors, including, of course, clear indications that the program works well in the community, as well as multi-agency involvement in the selection, implementation, and monitoring of the program.

## **Lessons Learned**

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Since its inception, the Partnership has learned the following lessons.

### **Develop instruments and databases designed to meet your needs**

The Partnership had to develop and validate new screening tools and assessments because available assessments were not sufficiently interdisciplinary to permit a comprehensive understanding of the etiology of problems and to facilitate multi-systemic service planning. The Partnership also had to develop a range of databases that are essential for monitoring for fidelity, workplace efficiency, and timely reporting.

### **Sustain programs through changes in leadership**

Staff turnover at the agency director level can undermine collaborations, particularly when the individual leaving has a personality that drives the interagency process forward; when he or she leaves, there can be some drift in focus and energy. The Partnership model is sufficiently

stable that the collaboration does, given some time, tend to self-adjust when one of its key partners turns over.

## **Manage relationships and conflicts**

The Partnership Board is comprised exclusively of leaders of government agencies. From the outset, some community-based organizations (CBOs) were concerned that this new structure would disrupt their funding and their ability to communicate easily with government agencies that were essential to their ongoing activities. Over time, many of those concerns have been allayed through the activities of a consortium of community stakeholders that regularly meets to provide advice to the Board. In addition, the Partnership has, from the outset, provided systematic support to CBOs, assisting them in identifying evidence-based programs and in implementing them.

## **Be aware of potential for resistance to change**

Replacing longstanding programs with evidence-based versions can generate conflict in the form of staff non-compliance or hostility to change. The Partnership, with a staff that works for a range of public agencies (as opposed to just one), is able to direct blame for change away from the agencies and toward the Partnership itself. Displacement of blame away from board members (all public agency directors) reduces the likelihood that an organization will withdraw from the collaboration's interests as the conflicts associated with change or reform occur.

## **Reinforce staff commitment**

The commitment of Partnership staff, and their ability to accept the blame for change and to displace credit for success toward agency leaders, is a critical component of the Partnership's success. Equally important is their experience in multi-systemic work and capacity to support activities across disciplinary lines. To support and reinforce staff commitment and skills, they must have the strong and open support of the Board and Executive Director and access to ongoing training and technical assistance.

## **Accomplishments**

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- The Partnership has implemented over 25 evidence-based educational and human services programs.
- Since the inception of the Partnership, a significant impact on youth outcomes has occurred. This includes the following:
  - Significant reductions in the number of youth reporting substance use within a 30-day period
  - Significant increases in standardized test scores, particularly in elementary schools with high poverty levels
  - Substantial declines in the rates of arrests for violent crimes and property crimes
  - Decreases by more than half in juvenile detention expenditures
  - Declines in the foster-care population
- The model has been replicated in Washington, DC and other communities.

